



G62 An Unusual Homicide-Suicide Modality in an Elderly Couple

Margherita Neri, MD, PhD, Natascha Pascale, MD, Sara Vita, MD, and Irene Riezzo, MD, PhD, Department of Forensic Pathology, University of Foggia, Osp D'Avanzo, Viale degli Aviatori, 1, Foggia, 71100, ITALY*

The goal of this presentation is to present a case of homicide-suicide in an elderly couple, characterized by an unusual complex suicide achieved by three different tools: a knife, a razor blade, and a claw hammer.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting the case of a homicide-suicide in an old couple, where the murderer garroted his wife with an elastic band, and then he tried to kill himself first hitting his head with a claw hammer and then cutting his neck and arms with a razor blade, and stabbing the chest and neck with a knife. Moreover claw hammer self-inflicted lesions on the scalp are very rare, in particular in association of knife and razor blade and in a case of homicide-suicide.

Complex suicide is very rarely described in literature; in this case it was used three different kind of tools: a knife, a razor blade and in particular a claw hammer.

Homicide-suicide (HS) is defined as that lethal event in which an individual kills another and subsequently commits suicide within one week. The unusual injuring tool and the relevant injuries which are produced the suicide were studied and analyzed to approach the case of dyadic death. The most important question for the forensic pathologist is to distinguish between a real homicide-suicide and a double murder.

On June 2, 2011 at 1:00 p.m., a woman called the police and said that she found her old parents dead. The police and the forensic pathologist went to the crime scene and found the body of a 72-year-old Caucasian woman inside of the bedroom of her own house. The woman lived in the house with her husband. The corpse was lying supine on the bed; she was fully and tidily dressed. She had an elastic band wrapped around her neck; this band was a length of 240cm, width of 11cm. The thanatological data recorded at 4.00 p.m., showed early rigor mortis, hypostasis that was totally blanched with fingers pressure, but congruous with the position, the rectal temperature was 35°C and ambient temperature was 25°C. Inside the bathroom, on the floor, was lying the body of a 78-year-old Caucasian man, his corpse appeared extensively blood-stained with a surrounding blood stain. Close to the left arm of the man, on the floor, was a knife, it was extensively blood-stained and it was length of 31cm, blade length of 19cm, blade maximum width 2.2cm. Close to the left foot, was a razor blade also blood-stained, with a length of 4cm, width 1cm and a hammer with double prong also smeared of blood. The thanatological data recorded, at 4:30 p.m., the body showed early rigor mortis, and hypostasis that was in part blanched with fingers pressure, but congruous with the position, the rectal temperature was 34.5°C and ambient temperature was 25°C. The Prosecutor arranged the autopsy on the bodies because it was necessary to clear up the circumstances of the death and distinguish between homicide-suicide and double homicide. A complete autopsy was performed 24-hours after death on both bodies. At the external examination, the old man showed peculiar lesions of the head: multiple couple of linear lacerations of the scalp including tissue bridges because of the gap between the two claws, although some of the injuries caused marks of the skull. The damage was probably inflicted with a claw hammer. Moreover, it was present multiple slashed wounds on the neck, both forearms and chest; in particular on the neck three stab wounds: two superficial on the left side and one deeper than others on the right side. Section of the neck revealed hemorrhages in the subcutaneous tissues and at the right stub wound sternocleidomastoid muscle and the right jugular vein showed a deep tear. The other organs did not showed specific alterations except for an intense anemia. The toxicological analysis was negative and the cause of death was a hemorrhagic shock.

The woman showed, at the external examination, a remarkable cyanosis of the face, lips and nails; skin petechial hemorrhages in frontal and periorbital region and mucosal petechiae on oral vestibule and both conjunctivas were also detected. The face was covered with various bruises and superficial skin tears. On the neck a horizontal mild blue bruise areas was present with nails marks. Section of the neck revealed hemorrhages in the subcutaneous tissues and in both sternocleidomastoid muscles and thyroid muscles. Esophagus, larynx, and trachea were unremarkable. Subpericardial and subpleural petechiae were detected. The other organs did not showed specific alterations except for an intense vascular congestion. Skin sections for histological examination were removed at the neck in long strips perpendicular to bruises. Sample of muscle tissue were also taken at the neck. The histological examination showed mild hemorrhages in the cutaneous and subcutaneous tissues, and in the muscles. The stratum corneum of the epidermidis was detached and the dermis was split from the epidermis. An immunohistochemical study was performed to evidence the vitality of the skin injury. The toxicological analysis was negative. According to the examination of neck bruises, autopsy findings and histological data, the mechanisms of death consisted with an asphyxia. Death was attributed to an external neck compression; the tool that caused the death was perfectly compatible with the elastic band found on near the body.

Homicide-Suicide, Claw Hammer, Self-Inflicted Injury